



**Testimony Supporting
SB 294, An Act Concerning Housing Protections for Victims of Family Violence**

**Housing Committee
March 10, 2022**

Good afternoon Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee. Women's Support Services (WSS) provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Salisbury, North Canaan, Canaan, Sharon, Cornwall, and Kent. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

Senate Bill 294 is one of CCADV's and WSS's priority bills. It seeks to prohibit a landlord from taking certain adverse actions against a tenant based on such tenant's family violence victim status.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Survivors face many unique barriers to finding safe and affordable housing because of the actions of their abuser. Financial abuse is present in 99% of abusive relationships, meaning that a survivor may lack access to the family's financial resources, have been forced into un- or underemployment, or had their credit destroyed, all compromising their ability to financially secure housing on their own, apart from their abuser. Survivors may also face a history of evictions or appear on a housing authority's "do not rent list" because of incidents or damage caused by the abuser. Housing instability can have a detrimental impact on survivors and their children, causing additional physical and mental health challenges.

WSS has seen demand for sheltering and housing services explode. In the 7 months prior to the pandemic, WSS sheltered 19 adults and 10 children for 471 nights. This year, since July 2021, WSS has sheltered a comparable number of individuals - 13 adults and 13 children - but for 1,491 nights, a more than 3-fold increase. This reflects the shortage of affordable, safe housing for survivors. It also reflects the growing

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complexity of multiple barriers - economic, social / emotional, medical, legal - that overlap to keep families already struggling with violence and coercion in crisis for much longer.

Connecticut's highly competitive housing market makes it increasingly difficult for victims to secure affordable housing, especially housing in their current neighborhood where they feel at home, where their children attend school, and where they are close to their support system. It is critical that we find ways to protect a victim's ability to remain safely in existing housing. Victims should not face housing discrimination or eviction because of their abuser's actions. This bill seeks to provide protections for victims related to eviction, increases in rent, refusal to renew a lease, decreases in services, and violations of lease agreements because of the violence committed against them. It will provide one tool for victims and their children to remain safely housed. We urge the Committee's support with the substitute language offered by CCADV.

Thank you for your consideration.

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